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ELECTIONEERING METHODS IN ENGLAND.

BY H. W. LUCY, AUTHOR OF "A DIARY OF TWO PARLIAMENTS," ETC.

MANY Reform Bills have been passed through the English Parliament since 1832, and the franchise is to-day so comprehensive as to seem practically near manhood suffrage. Nevertheless, the retreat before the advance of Democracy has been slow and stubborn, and during its progress the classes have been able here and there to plant stockades that still resist the forward rush of the masses. With a population that almost touches thirty-eight millions the register of voters for the United Kingdom just exceeds six millions. How far this falls short of manhood suffrage will appear from the fact that there are eight million families tabulated in the census figures, and it may be presumed that each, whether in the case of father or elder brother, includes a male adult.

But the statement that there are six millions on the register far exceeds the number of individuals who have a vote. Plural voting, one of the anomalies the Liberals are pledged to remove at the earliest opportunity, is still legalized and is widely availed of. In one of his speeches in the recent Midlothian campaign Mr. Gladstone cited a case, brought under his notice on indisputable authority, where a single man possessed forty votes. As some people give themselves up to the craze of collecting china or first editions of books, this gentleman had devoted time and money to the acquisition of this rare, probably unique, collection of Parliamentary votes. The enterprise was one involving the exercise of much skill and management. The connoisseur would have ever to bear in mind the strictly marked limit of time within which a general election is completed. The statute sets forth that in boroughs an election must take place within nine days (exclusive

of Sunday) from the receipt of the writ. In counties the first possible day for polling is the seventh after receiving the writ, the last day being the seventeenth. Since it would be no use to possess a vote unless it were available, the collector, it will appear, must needs bear in mind these considerations, and must so arrange the area of his possession that, with ordinary luck in the way of avoiding the clashing of dates, he may cover the whole ground within the limit of nine days for the boroughs and sixteen for the counties. As the Liberals intend, when their chance comes, not only to establish the principle of "One man, One vote," but to fix all the polling at a general election to take place on one day, plural votes are already a drug in the market, and will presently become of as little value as albums of old postage-stamps and other curios that have had their day.

This possibility of six million electors exercising the franchise, inadequate as it is in comparison to the population, shows an immense advance on the state of things existing so recently as 1859. Speaking in that year Mr. Bright stated that the so-called appeal to the country which had taken place in the previous year was actually an appeal to 800,000 men, whilst, as the total of the poll showed, not more than half the number responded. The electorate were, at that time even more heavily than now, hampered by the stockades alluded to. The most formidable of these is found in the regulations of the register, which are evidently designed to limit as far as possible the opportunities of the masses. Both of the great political parties engage paid agents to look after the register in the various constituencies. By these persons acting in the interest of their several parties, omissions made by the overseers in the duty of placing properly qualified electors on the register are to a great extent corrected. But the stipulations as to date which hem in the register practically disfranchise a large proportion of the working classes. In the general election which has just taken place in England no man was able to vote unless he had occupied and paid rates for a house during the full period of twelve months ending the 15th of July, 1891. This means—the date of occupation commencing in July, 1890—that a man must have been a resident for fully two years in the same electoral district if he would exercise the franchise understood to be his birthright. The laboring population of England is ever shifting as work fails in one place and promise of it beckons from another.

The consequence is that in considering the tactics of a general election it is always found desirable in the Conservative interest to fix the date for a late period of the year, when the voting must needs be on an old register. This is another wheel in the electoral machinery which the Liberals propose to oil when they come into power.

Household suffrage is the basis of parliamentary franchise alike in counties and boroughs. In the counties there are also leasehold and copyhold franchises and for freehold property of forty shillings value and upwards. In Plantagenet days Parliaments were annual or even oftener. In 1694 a Triennial Act was passed and was some twenty years later repealed in favor of the Septennial Act which at this day covers the duration of the life of Parliament. Shorter Parliaments is another plank in the Liberal programme drawn up and subscribed at Newcastle this year. But though Parliaments may sit the full term of seven years they never do, the occasions being rare when a period of six years is exceeded.

When Parliament is sitting by-elections follow upon vacancies created by various causes, such as death, promotion to peerage, acceptance of office within direct gift of the Crown, or, as has happened in two cases during the life of the present Parliament, by expulsion of a sitting member. There was a time, strange as it appears in this day, when election to serve in Parliament was regarded as a drudgery, to be avoided at any cost. Thence arose the stipulation that no duly-elected member may at his own will retire from his place in the Legislature. This law is evaded by another clause of the statute, which vacates a seat upon the acceptance by a member of a place of profit under the Crown. Thus when a member wishes, for private reasons, to resign his seat, he makes formal application to the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the post of Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds, a shadowy office, his being formally established in which *ipso facto* forfeits his seat in Parliament, and if he wants to get back he can do so only after reëlection.

In the case of by-elections the issue of a writ is moved in the House by the whip of the party to which the retiring member has belonged. It is thereupon issued on the warrant of the Speaker. There being no Speaker in existence when Parliament has been dissolved, the Queen in council issues a warrant addressed to the Lord Chancellors of Great Britain and Ireland, who in turn di-

rect the Clerk of the Crown to issue the writs. These documents are addressed to the returning officers in the various counties and towns, with whom, thereafter, rests the direction of the business of election. In boroughs the returning officer is the Mayor, the Sheriff acting in that capacity in counties. When a member comes up to Westminster after his election, he is not permitted to take the oath or sign the roll till he has handed to the Clerk of Parliament the return to the writ duly attested by Sheriff or Mayor. When he is brought up to the table by the two members who have undertaken to introduce him, he is always met at the corner of the table by the clerk, who stands with outstretched hand. Sometimes a nervous member, misconstruing this action, seizes the hand and warmly shakes it. Others find they have forgotten to bring with them the document for which it is extended. No one who was in the House when the present Lord Chancellor, after many reverses in the electoral field, came up to take his seat for Launceston, will forget the scene. Sir Hardinge Giffard, as he then was, had mislaid the return to the writ. He was positive he had brought it down to the House, and felt convinced it must be secreted somewhere about his person. Standing in the centre of a crowded and laughing House, the new Solicitor General proceeded to search in all his pockets for the document, producing out of each more miscellaneous papers than it seemed possible for a man of his stature to carry about with him. When in his hurried agonized search he had nearly buried the mace under papers, Sir Henry James, who had accompanied him to the table, returned with the missing document, which he had found under the bench where the new member had sat awaiting the summons to the table.

In the good old times nomination used to be an early and prominent ordeal through which candidates passed on their way to Parliament. A wooden structure was erected, a vast crowd assembled, and the candidates having struggled their way through were proposed, seconded, and made speeches in reply. These public nominations were perfect pandemoniums, fitly ushering in the state of things that used to exist, and which is found pictured in the plates of Gilroy and Cruikshank, and in the account of the Eatonswill election, which, extravagant as it seems, was merely a transcript from Charles Dickens' note-book as a newspaper reporter. Much more recent memory recalls this cu-

rious custom. I have a vivid recollection of an election in Shropshire, in the general elections of 1865, on a description of which for a local newspaper I tried my prentice hand. One of the candidates was Sir Baldwin Leighton, father of the present baronet. He had affronted public opinion in some action taken in his magisterial capacity touching possession of certain rabbit skins. When he presented himself in front of the platform to accept the nomination just moved and seconded, the sky suddenly became obscured by a sudden shower of rabbit skins, with which the hapless candidate was pelted throughout the discreetly brief continuance of his address.

Under existing regulations the nomination of a parliamentary candidate is a dull, business-like arrangement, got over in a few minutes in a back room in the town or county hall. Any two registered electors may propose and second a candidate, using nomination forms provided by the returning officer. No nomination paper will be accepted unless, in addition to the mover and seconder, eight other registered electors of the constituency sign it. Only the candidate, his proposer, seconder, and one other person, usually his agent, may attend the nomination which must be accomplished before noon on the appointed day.

As the elector is deprived of the interest and excitement of the old nomination day, so is the act of voting reduced to the simplest proportion. The voting is taken by ballot in much the same way as the process is accomplished in the United States. The system is scarcely yet acclimatized in this country, more especially in the rural districts, where the voter, long accustomed to domination of parson and squire, has difficulty in believing that their eye is not upon him even in the recesses of the polling place. There are, however, shining exceptions to this density of perception. One is recorded from a Hampshire polling place. The elector, a plowman, was brought up to the polling place by his employer, a farmer, enthusiastically attached to Conservative colors. "Be sure," he said, "to mark the cross against the name at the top of the paper, and you'll be all right." "Did you do it?" he asked, when the voter came out of the polling booth. "Yes," said the plowman, "but (this explanation was reserved for the private ear of another audience) I first took care to turn the paper upside down." Another voter, of the Roman Catholic faith, was instructed that on going to the poll he should

put an X opposite the name of Mr. Fraser Mackintosh, one of the candidates. Misunderstanding the injunction, he, on entering the booth, alarmed the polling sheriff by dropping on his knees, crossing himself, and crying aloud on "Fraser Mackintosh!"

The direct effect of recent legislation, reforming the electoral system, has been to reduce the cost of elections. History is full of records of ruinous contests taking place under the ancient system. Among the most famous elections in the old style was that which took place in Westminster in 1784, when Fox offered himself for reelection. This was the contest in which the Duchess of Devonshire took so prominent and influential a part. Walpole has a good deal to say on the subject. Writing under date of April 13, in this year, he says: "During her canvass the Duchess made no scruple of visiting the humblest of the electors, dazzling and enchanting them by the fascination of her manner, the power of her beauty, and the influence of her high rank, sometimes carrying off to the hustings (meaning the polling place) the meanest mechanic in her own carriage." Six days later Lord Cornwallis writes: "The Duchess of Devonshire is indefatigable in her canvass for Fox. She was in the most blackguard houses in Long Acre by eight o'clock in the morning." It was in this neighborhood that a butcher, whose vote was not to be purchased on other terms, sold it for a kiss from the gracious dame, who to this day lives on Gainsborough's canvass.

Another person who took scarcely a less prominent part in the contest was the Prince of Wales. It was said he canvassed in person for a candidate whose cause was dear to him, since it was hateful to his royal father and mother. There is no doubt that members of his household were engaged day and night in furthering the fortunes of the great Whig. On the day the poll was won the Prince, who had been in attendance upon the King at a review at Ascot, posted home and, wearing Fox's colors, rode up St. James street amid the acclamations of a Whig mob. How far partisanship was carried in those days is indicated by the fact that Washington, in arms across the Atlantic against King George, having clothed his army in uniform of buff and blue, Fox adopted those colors as his own, the Prince of Wales positively ordering a uniform of the rebel colors and appearing in public so distinguished.

For full forty days the polling lasted, during which time the

Strand and the neighborhood of Covent Garden were crowded with mobs who took each other by the throat whenever they met. What with the actual expenditure in money by the candidates, the loss of time to a mass of people engaged in the contest, and the general demoralization that spread, a Parliamentary contest at the beginning of the century was nothing less than a public calamity. Wilberforce first gained his seat at this same general election, 1784, coming in for Hull at a cost out of his private purse of nearly £9,000. Bribery and trading were then matters of course. Wilberforce has stated that he found at Hull it was the openly established custom to give a resident elector a present of two guineas. He got double that sum if he plumped his vote, and every freeman brought in from London to vote cost the candidate £10. There was then, as now, a law against bribery, but it was evaded by the simple contrivance of withholding actual payment till the last day on which an election petition might be presented.

In 1807 Wilberforce took part in another and more memorable and more costly contest for the County of Yorkshire. The fact that within a week over £64,000 were subscribed to meet Wilberforce's expenses shows how high party feeling ran. Mr. Weller, Sr., has given an interesting and what is regarded in some quarters as an apocryphal account of how he influenced the course of an election by disposing of a coachload of voters committed to his charge. But what took place at election times in Merry England at the beginning of the century puts Mr. Weller's modest story in the shade. At an election for Berwick the Whig candidate provided a sloop to convey a number of freemen from London to Berwick. The other side got at the skipper, with the result that he missed his way on a familiar course and, pulling in at a Norwegian port, the electors did not arrive at their destination till the poll was closed. Precisely the very same thing took place at an Ipswich election, a batch of freemen going down from London finding themselves at Antwerp; and at Newcastle, where another cargo was delivered at Ostend and not reshipped till the election was over.

All that is changed now, and parliamentary elections have come to be prosaic performances, the most exciting incident being the blocking up of Fleet street by a crowd waiting to see the result of the various constituencies flashed on a white sheet by means of a magic lantern. These are our present-day election

manners. One thing that went to the root of the matter was the strict limitation of electioneering expenses decreed by the Corrupt Practices Act passed by Mr. Gladstone in his government of 1880. A maximum scale of expenditure is fixed and any proved excess invalidates the election. Standing for a borough of 2,000 electors a candidate may not disburse, either by himself or through his agent, a sum exceeding £350. For every additional thousand electors an extra £30 is permitted. In the counties where the area is wider and the inevitable expense larger, £650 is the legalized expense for a minimum register of 2,000 electors, with an increase of £60 for every additional thousand. The candidate is allowed a certain amount of pocket money. But if during and upon his election he spends more than £100, a detailed account must be sent in to the returning offices. Within thirty-five days of the close of the election, candidates are required to pay all their accounts and send in particulars with a statutory declaration solemnly affirming that the account is full and accurate.

Another straight blow delivered at corrupt practices by this same act was the prohibition of the use of hired carriages for conveying voters to the poll. The Duchess of Devonshire, were she now alive and interested in the Westminster or other contests, might, if she pleased, kiss an occasional butcher. But she would imperil her friend's election if she afterwards conveyed the pleased elector to the poll in a hired carriage. So searching is the act in this matter that it positively prohibits gratuitous use at an election of "any carriage, horse or other animal, ordinarily kept or used for the purpose of letting out for hire." In one of the Edinburgh elections just closed a curious point arose on this section of the statute. An elector drove up to the poll and paid the driver his legal fare, one shilling; the driver was observed shortly after to enter the poll and record his vote. The question agitating local authorities, one that may yet be argued in a court of law, is, Was the cabman conveyed to the poll, contrary to the statute, in a conveyance "ordinarily kept or used for the purpose of letting out for hire?"

The process of parliamentary elections in the United Kingdom does not vary in any of its constituent parts. There are some local customs obtaining in one place and non-existent in another. But they are not material. For example, in all parts

electors have the right to cross-examine candidates coming before them at public meetings, but Scotch electors lay themselves out for enjoyment of the privilege with characteristic deliberation and determination. To the extent to which it is carried out north of the Tweed it is exclusively a Scotch habit, and has a quaintly expressive Scotch name. It is called "heckling." Up to the date of the general election just concluded Mr. Gladstone had escaped the ordeal, no one presuming to heckle him. At one of his meetings, held in a suburb of Edinburgh, the spell was broken. At Corstorphine, as the place is called, there is a local brewer named Usher, a stolid, dour man, who saw no reason why, because the candidate was illustrious, individual electors should not emerge from their obscurity and "heckle" him. Accordingly, when Mr. Gladstone had finished his speech, Mr. Usher rose with quite a bundle of manuscript in his hand, presumably containing questions. At sight of him the audience set up a roar of execration that would have made some men shrink into their boots. Providentially Mr. Usher is deaf, and may have thought what he heard was a whisper of encouragement. Moreover he, to common local knowledge, wears a wig, and Scotch "wut" broke forth in hilarious cries of "Go and get your hair cut !"

Mr. Gladstone at length succeeded in obtaining a hearing for his interlocutor, and answered a question about his view of the plan of campaign that should have sufficed, but impervious, implacable Mr. Usher went on. "Am I," he said, "to understand"—Mr. Gladstone was at this moment seated in his chair with hand to ear, endeavoring through the growing clamor to catch what he called "this respected gentleman's" remarks. He caught this one, and, leaping to his feet with catapultic energy, leaned over the platform rail and shouted in Mr. Usher's more vulnerable ear: "I cannot answer for this gentleman's understanding. I am responsible to Almighty God for the measure of intelligence in this skull," he continued, rapping his own, "but I am not responsible for the amount of intelligence Almighty God has placed in *that* skull;" and he pointed with a wave of infinite contempt at the interrogative brewer. Sitting close by Mr. Gladstone on the platform, and catching sight of his gleaming eyes as they flashed on the hapless brewer standing below, I never saw the human face and figure so perfectly resemble an enraged eagle clawing at its prey.

H. W. LUCY.